The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

Author of "The Fighting Chance," Etc.

An hour later he sent his card in to Rosamund Fane, and Rosamund came down presently, mystified, flattered, yet shrewdly alert and prepared for anything since the miracle of his coming justified such preparation.

"Why in the world," she said, with a flushed gayety perfectly genuine, "did you ever come to see me?"

"It's only this," he said—"I am wondering whether you would do anything for me."

"Anything! Merci! Isn't that extremely general, Captain Selwyn? But you never can tell. Ask me."

So he bent forward, his clasped hands between his knees, and told her very earnestly of his fears about Gerald, asking her to use her undoubted influence with the boy to shame him from the card tables, explaining how utterly disastrous to him and his family his present course was.

"Could you help us?" he asked.

"Help us, Captain Selwyn? Who is the 'us,' please?"

"Why, Gerald and me—and his family," he added, meeting her eyes. The eyes began to dance with malice.

"His family," repeated Rosamund—"that is to say, his sister, Miss Erroll. His family, I believe, ends there does it not?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fane."

"I see. Miss Erroll is naturally worried over him. But I wonder why she did not come to me herself instead of sending you as her errant ambassador."

"Miss Erroll did not send me," he said, flushing up. And, looking steadily into the smiling doll's face confronting him, he knew again that he had failed.

She smiled. "Come to me on your own errand, for Gerald's sake, for anybody's sake, for your own preferably, and I'll listen, but don't come to me on another woman's errands, for I won't listen even to you."

"I have come on my own errand," he repeated coldly. "Miss Erroll knew nothing about it and shall not hear of it from me. Can you not help me, Mrs. Fane?"

But Rosamund's rose china features had hardened into a polished smile, and Selwyn stood up wearily to make his adieu.

But as he entered his hansom before the door he knew the end was not yet, and once more he set his face toward the impossible, and once more the hansom rolled away over the asphalt, and once more it stopped, this time before the house of Ruthven.

Ruthven's greeting was a pallid stare, but as Selwyn made no motion to rise he lounged over to a couch and, half reclining among the cushions, shot an insolent glance at Selwyn, then yawned and examined the bangles on his wrist.

After a moment Selwyn said, "Mr. Ruthven, you are no doubt surprised that I am here."

"I'm not surprised if it's my wife you've come to see," drawled Ruthven. "If I'm the object of your visit, I confess to some surprise—as much as the visit is worth and no more."

The vulgarity of the insult under the man's own roof scarcely moved Selwyn to any deeper contempt and certainly not to anger.

"I did not come here to ask a favor of you," he said coolly, "for that is out of the question, Mr. Ruthven. But I came to tell you that Mr. Erroll's family has forbidden him to continue his gambling in this house and in your company anywhere or at any time."

"Most extraordinary," murmured Ruthven, passing his ringed fingers over his minutely shaven face—that strange face of a boy hardened by the depravity of ages.

"So I must request you," continued Selwyn, "to refuse him the opportunity of gambling here. Will you do it—voluntarily?"

"No."

"Then I shall use my judgment in the matter."

"And what may your judgment in the matter be?"

"I have not yet decided. For one thing I might enter a complaint with the police that a boy is being morally and materially ruined in your private gambling establishment."

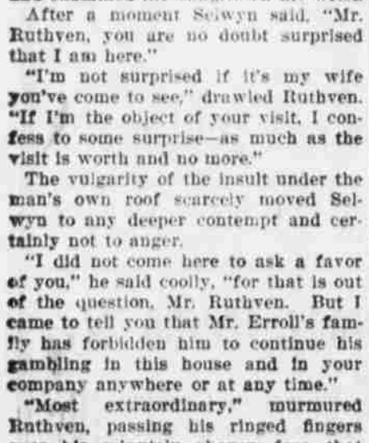
"Is that a threat?"

"No. I will act, not threaten."

"Ah," drawled Ruthven, "I may do the same the next time my wife spends the evening in your apartment."

"You lie!" said Selwyn in a voice made low by surprise.

"Oh, no, I don't. Very chivalrous of you—quite proper for you to deny it like a gentleman—but useless, quite useless. So the less said about invoking the law the better for—some people. You'll agree with me, I dare say. And now, concerning your friend Gerald Erroll—I have not the slightest desire to see him play cards. Whether or not he plays is a matter perfectly indifferent to me, and you had better understand it. But if you come here demanding that I arrange my guest lists to suit you you are losing time."



"M-murder!" stammered Mr. Ruthven.

Selwyn, almost stunned at Ruthven's knowledge of the episode in his rooms, had risen as he gave the man the lie direct.

For an instant, now, as he stared at him, there was murder in his eye. Then the utter hopeless helplessness of his position overwhelmed him as Ruthven, with danger written all over him, stood up, his soft, smooth thumbs hooked in the glittering sash of his kimono.

"Scowl if you like," he said, backing away instinctively, but still nervously impertinent, "and keep your distance; if you've anything further to say to me, write it." Then, growing bolder as Selwyn made no offensive move: "Write to me," he repeated, with a venomous smirk. "It's safer for you to figure as my correspondent than as my wife's corespondent. L-let go of me! W-what the devil are you d-d-doing?"

For Selwyn had him fast, one sinewy hand twisted in his silken collar, holding him squirming at arm's length.

"M-murder!" stammered Mr. Ruthven.

"No," said Selwyn, "not this time. But be very, very careful after this."

And he let him go with an involuntary shudder and wiped his hands on his handkerchief.

Ruthven stood quite still, and after a moment the livid terror died out in his face and a rushing flush spread over it—a strange, dreadful shade curiously opaque—and he half turned, dizzily, hands outstretched for self support.

Selwyn coolly watched him as he sank on to the couch and sat huddled together and leaning forward, his soft, ringed fingers covering his empurpled face.

Then Selwyn went away with a shrug of utter loathing, but after he had gone and Ruthven's servants had discovered him and summoned a physician their master lay heavily amid his painted draperies and cushions, his congested features set, his eyes partly open and possessing sight, but the whites of them had disappeared, and the eyes themselves, save for the pupils, were like two dark slits filled with blood.

There was no doubt about it. The doctors, one and all, knew their business when they had so often cautioned Mr. Ruthven to avoid sudden and excessive emotions.

That night Selwyn wrote briefly to Mrs. Ruthven:

I saw your husband this afternoon. He is at liberty to inform you of what passed. But in case he does not there is one detail which you ought to know—your husband believes that you once paid a visit to my apartments. It is unlikely that he will repeat the accusation, and I think there is no occasion for you to worry. However, it is only proper that you should know this, which is my only excuse for writing you a letter that requires no acknowledgment. Very truly yours, PHILIP SELWYN.

To this letter she wrote an excited and somewhat incoherent reply, and, rereading it in troubled surprise, he began to recognize in it something of the strange, illogical, impulsive attitude which had confronted him in the first weeks of his wedded life.

Here was the same minor undertone of unrest sounding ominously through every line; the same illogical, unhappy attitude which implied so much and said so little, leaving him uneasy and disconcerted, conscious of the vague recklessness and veiled reproach, dragging him back from the present through the dead years to confront once more the old pain, the old bewilderment at the hopeless misunderstanding between them.

Chapter 16

NINA had run up to town for a day from Silverside and had telephoned Selwyn to take her somewhere for luncheon. She urged him to return with her, insisting that a week end at Silverside was what he needed to avert physical disintegration.

"What is there to keep you in town?" she demanded. "The children have been clamoring for you day and night, and Eileen has been expecting a letter. You promised to write her, Phil."

"I'm going to write to her," he said impatiently. "Wait a moment, Nina. Don't speak of anything pleasant or—or intimate just now, because—because I've got to bring up another matter—something not very pleasant to me or to you. It is about—Alixe. You knew her in school years ago. You have always known her."

"Yes."

"You—did you ever visit her—stay at the Varians' house?"

"Yes."

"In—in her own home in Westchester?"

"Yes."

There was a silence. His eyes shifted to his plate; remained fixed as he said:

"Then you knew her—father?"

"Yes, Phil," she said quietly, "I knew Mr. Varian."

"Was there anything—anything unusual—about him—in those days?"

"Have you heard that for the first time?" asked his sister.

He looked up. "Yes. What was it, Nina?"

She became busy with her plate for awhile. He sat rigid, patient, one hand resting on his claret glass. And presently she said without meeting his eyes:

"It was even farther back—her grandparents—one of them"— She lifted her head slowly. "That is why it so deeply concerned us, Phil, when we heard of your marriage."

"What concerned you?"

"The chance of inheritance—the risk of the taint—of transmitting it. Her father's erratic brilliancy became more than eccentricity before I knew him. I would have told you that had I dreamed that you ever could have thought of marrying Alixe Varian. But how could I know you would meet her out there in the orient? It was—your cable to us was like a thunderbolt. And when she—she left you so suddenly—Phil, dear—I feared the true reason—the only possible reason that could be responsible for such an insane act."

"What was the truth about her father?" he said doggedly. "He was eccentric. Was he ever worse than that?"

"The truth was that he became mentally irresponsible before his death."

"You know this?"

"Alixe told me when we were schoolgirls. And for days she was haunted with the fear of what might one day be her inheritance. That is all I know, Phil."

He nodded and for awhile made some pretense of eating, but presently leaned back and looked at his sister out of dazed eyes.

"Do you suppose," he said heavily, "that she was not entirely responsible when—when she went away?"

"I have wondered," said Nina simply. "Austin believes it."

"I can't believe it," he said, staring at vacancy. "I refuse to." And, thinking of her last frightened and excited letter imploring an interview with him and giving the startling reason, "What a scoundrel that fellow Ruthven is," he said, with a shudder.

That night he wrote to Alixe:

If Ruthven threatens you with divorce on such a ground he himself is likely to be adjudged mentally unsound. It was a brutal, stupid threat, nothing more, and his insult to your father's memory was more brutal still. Don't be stampeded by such threats. Disprove them by your calm self control under provocation. Disprove them by your discretion and self confidence. Give nobody a single possible reason for gossip. And, above all, Alixe, don't become worried and morbid over anything you might dread as inheritance, for you are as sound today as you were when I first met you, and you shall not doubt that you could ever be anything else. Be the woman you can be. Show the pluck and courage to make the very best out of life. I have slowly learned to attempt it, and it is not difficult if you convince yourself that it can be done.

To this she answered the next day:

I will do my best. There is danger, treachery, everywhere, and if it becomes unendurable I shall put an end to it in one way or another. As for his threat—incident on my admitting that I did go to your room and defying him to dare believe evil of me for doing it—I can laugh at it now, though when I wrote you I was terrified, remembering how mentally broken my father was when he died.

But, as you say, I am sound, body and mind. I know it. I don't doubt it for one moment—except, at long intervals, when, apropos of nothing, a faint sensation of dread comes creeping.

But I am sound! I know it so absolutely that I sometimes wonder at my own perfect sanity and understanding, and so clearly, so faultlessly, so precisely does my mind work that—and this I never told you—I am often and often able to detect mental inadequacy in many people around me, the slightest deviation from the normal, the least degree of mental instability. And it would amaze you, too, if I should tell you how many, many people you know are in some degree more or less insane.

He's only serenely disagreeable to me now, and we see almost nothing of one another except over the card tables. Gerald has been winning rather heavily, I am glad to say—glad as long as I cannot prevent him from playing. And yet I may be able to accomplish that yet in a roundabout way, because the apple visaged and hawk beaked Mr. Neergard has apparently become my slavish creature—quite infatuated. And as soon as I've fastened on his collar and made sure that Rosamund can't unhook it I'll try to make him shut down on Gerald's playing. This for your sake, Phil—because you ask me and because you must always stand for all that is upright and good and manly in my eyes. Ah, Phil, what a fool I was! And all, all my own fault too! ALIXE.

This ended the sudden eruption of correspondence, for he did not reply to this letter, though in it he read enough to make him gravely uneasy, and he fell once more into the habit of brooding, from which both Boots Lansing and Eileen had almost weaned him.

Also he began to take long, solitary walks in the park when not occupied in conferences with the representatives of the Lawn Nitro Powder works, a company which had recently approached him in behalf of his unperfected explosive, chaosite.

Lying back there in his desk chair one evening, Selwyn suddenly remembered that Gerald had come in. They had scarcely seen one another since that unhapy meeting in the Stuyvesant club, and now, remembering what he had written to Eileen, he emerged with a start from his contented dreaming, sobered by the prospect of seeking Gerald.

For a moment or two he hesitated, but he had said in his letter that he was going to do it, and now he rose, looked around for his pipe, found it, filled and lighted it and, throwing on his dressing gown, went out into the corridor, tying the tasseled cords around his waist as he walked.

His first knock remaining unanswered, he knocked more sharply. Then he heard from within the muffled creak of a bed, heavy steps across the floor. The door opened with a jerk. Gerald

Gerald sat on the edge of the bed.

stood there, eyes swollen, hair in disorder and collar crushed and the white evening tie unknotted and dangling over his soiled shirt front.

"Hello," said Selwyn simply. "May I come in?"

The boy passed his hand across his eyes as though confused by the light. Then he turned and walked back toward the bed, still rubbing his eyes, and sat down on the edge.

Selwyn closed the door and seated himself, apparently not noticing Gerald's dishevelment.

"Thought I'd drop in for a good night pipe," he said quietly. "By the way, Gerald, I'm going down to Silverside next week. Nina has asked Boots too. Couldn't you fix it to come along with us?"

"I don't know," said the boy in a low voice. "I'd like to."

"Good business! That will be fine! What you and I need is a good stiff tramp across the moors or a gallop if you like. It's great for mental cobwebs, and my brain is disgracefully unswept. By the way, somebody said that you'd joined the Siowitha club."

"Yes," said the boy listlessly.

"Well, you'll get some lively trout fishing there now. It's only thirty miles from Silverside, you know. You can run over in the motor very easily."

Gerald nodded, sitting silent, his handsome head supported in both hands, his eyes on the floor.

That something was very wrong with him appeared plainly enough, but Selwyn, touched to the heart and miserably apprehensive, dared not question him unasked.

And so they sat there for awhile, Selwyn making what conversation he could, and at length Gerald turned and dragged himself across the bed, dropping his head back on the disordered pillows.

"Go on," he said; "I'm listening."

So Selwyn continued his pleasant, inconsequential observations, and Gerald lay with closed eyes quite motionless until, watching him, Selwyn saw his hand was trembling where it lay clinched beside him. And presently the boy turned his face to the wall.

Toward midnight Selwyn rose quietly, removed his unlighted pipe from between his teeth, knocked the ashes from it and pocketed it. Then he walked to the bed and seated himself on the edge.

"What's the trouble, old man?" he asked coolly.

There was no answer. He placed his hand over Gerald's. The boy's hand lay inert, then quivered and closed on Selwyn's convulsively.

"That's right," said the elder man; "that's what I'm here for—to stand by when you hoist signals. Go on."

The boy shook his head and buried it deeper in the pillow.

"Bad as that?" commented Selwyn quietly. "Well, what of it? I'm standing by, I tell you. That's right"—as Gerald broke down, his body quivering under the spasm of soundless grief—"that's the safety valve working. Good business. Take your time."

It took a long time, and Selwyn sat silent and motionless, his whole arm numb from its position and Gerald's crushing grasp. And at last, seeing that was the moment to speak, he said:

"Now let's fix up this matter, Gerald. Come on!"

"Good heavens! H-how can it be f-fixed?"

"I'll tell you when you tell me. It's a money difficulty, I suppose, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Cards?"

"P-partly."

"Oh, a note? Case of honor? Where is this I. O. U. that you gave?"

"It's worse than that. The—the note is paid. Good God—I can't tell you!"

"You must. That's why I'm here, Gerald."

"Well, then. I—I drew a check—knowing that I had no funds. If it—if they return it marked"—

"I see. What are the figures?"

The boy stammered them out. Selwyn's grave face grew graver still.

"That is bad," he said slowly, "very bad. Have you—but of course you couldn't have seen Austin."

"I'd kill myself first!" said Gerald fiercely.

"No, you wouldn't do that. You're not that kind. Keep perfectly cool, Gerald, because it is going to be fixed. The method only remains to be decided upon."

"I can't take your money!" stammered the boy. "I can't take a cent from you after what I've said—the beastly things I've said."

"It isn't the things you say to me, Gerald, that matter. Let me think a bit, and don't worry. Just lie quietly and understand that I'll do the worrying. And while I'm amusing myself with a little quiet reflection as to ways and means just take your own bearings from this reef and set a true course once more, Gerald. That is all the reproach, all the criticism, you are going to get from me. Deal with yourself and your God in silence."

(To be Continued.)

Obituary.

On the morning of March 20, 1909, Little May Muntz answered the summons of her Creator and entered into a well earned and deserved rest. Though it was hardly known outside of her immediate family, owing to her bravery and patience in enduring pain, for seventeen years she has been a terrible sufferer. Many kind neighbors and friends, who delighted to come and see her and spend a little while in her society, would invariably say how well she was looking, showing how successfully she could hide her own feelings and how uncomplaining was her way.

May was born January 2, 1864, in Hillsboro, Ohio. She entered the public schools, and although severely handicapped by becoming lame at this time, she netherless, being led on by her indomitable will, energy and exceeding bright mind, graduated from the high school with her class in 1882. Her teachers always had nothing but praise for her, and on account of her diligent work at school, she stood among the very best scholars of her class.

Except a short time spent in Cincinnati and Zanesville, all her life was spent with her parents at home, where she was ever faithful and did all in her power to lighten their burdens; and there can be no doubt but that her grief over the deaths of father and mother hastened her own.

She was reared in a Christian home and knew and believed the principles of Christianity from childhood. But during a revival meeting in 1883 she made public acknowledgment of her belief and joined the Methodist Church. On account of ill health she attended but few services, yet her heart was in the work, and her whole life was a shining example of good, practical religion. A good word for everybody, and whenever she suffered an injury or wrong from anyone it was always promptly forgiven.

She was always especially fond of all dumb animals, and they found a firm friend when they were mistreated or were friendless or homeless. It is indeed true.

"He prayeth best who loveth best
"All things, both great and small."

The last three weeks of her life were spent in the most intense suffering and she made a brave fight, but realizing that she was in the grip of a fatal disease that would inevitably conquer, as she had always done in every situation, she faced the future bravely.

She knew what the end would be and wanted to live, but knowing that she could not she bravely said, "Don't grieve for me, everything is alright and I am not afraid to die." Then with rare thoughtfulness she talked with each one of the family and wished that each one might be spared the suffering that she had endured, and told them how they might carry out her wishes after she was gone.

At last, after weeks of great pain, death swept across her beautiful face, and her two sisters, four brothers and friends feel like a dark cloud has passed over the bright sun. But this shadow will pass away, and then each will remember what she desired them to do, and her influence will endure, thus showing that she is not dead, but sleepeth.

"'He who giveth his beloved sleep,' laid the weary head upon the bossom of infinite love to rest forever more."

Judge—Why did you stike this man?"

Prisoner—What would you do, judge, if you kept a grocery store and a man came in and asked if he could take a moving picture of your cheese?—Harper's Weekly.

The "pure food law" is designed by the Government to protect the public from injurious ingredients in both foods and drugs. It is beneficial both to the public and to the conscientious manufacturer. Ely's Cream Balm, a successful remedy for cold in the head, nasal catarrh, hay fever, etc., containing no injurious drugs, meets fully the requirments of the new law, and that fact is prominently stated on every package. It contains none of the injurious drugs which are required by the law to be mentioned on the label. Hence you can use it safely.

"Did the big capitalist make a good witness?"

"A good witness? I should say he did. He actually swore to his own name and address."—Detroit Free Press.

Blobbs—What power is your automobile?

Slobbs—Forty horse and twice as much will power.—Philadelphia Record.

A ton of Dead Sea water will yield 187 pounds of salt when evaporated.

"Why do you call your wife Marathon?"

"Because she can run up bills faster than anybody I every knew."—Detroit Free Press.

"I heard him behind the door pleading for 'just one.' They must be engaged."

"No, there're married. It was a shilling he was pleading for."—Pearson's Weekly.

With the waist line six inches above the knee in the new gowns we foresee almost insurmountable difficulties in the way of walking in the moonlight with our arm around her waist.—State Journal.

Louisiana is estimated to waste 75,000,000 cubic feet of natural gas daily—more than one-twentieth of that consumed in the United States—and the secretary of the interior has withdrawn from entry 6500 acres of natural gas fields.

Hob—Would you like to see women voters at the polls?

Nob—Yes, indeed. At the North and South poles.—Sewance Tiger.